

U.S. Army Engineer Museum

Fort Leonard Wood, MO

A POEM FOR THE ENGINEERS

The Sons of Martha

1907

Rudyard Kipling

The Sons of Mary seldom bother,
for they have inherited that good part;
But the Sons of Martha favor their mother
of the careful soul and the troubled heart.
And because she lost her temper once,
and because she was rude to the lord her guest,
Her sons must wait upon Mary's Sons,
world without end, reprieve, or rest.
It is their care in all the ages to take the buffet and
cushion the shock.
It is their care that the gear engages; it is their care
that the switches lock.
It is their care that the wheels run truly, it is their care
to embark and entrain,
Tally, transport, and deliver duly the Sons of Mary by land
and main.
They say to mountains "Be ye removed. "They say to the
lesser floods, "Be dry."
Under their rods are the rocks reproved - They are not
afraid of that which is high
Then do the hill-tops shake to the summit - Then is the bed
of the deep laid bare,
That the Sons of Mary may overcome it, pleasantly sleeping
and unaware.
They finger death at their gloves' end where they piece and
repiece the living wires.
He rears against the gates they tend: They feed him, hungry
behind their fires.
Early at dawn, ere men see clear, They stumble into his
terrible stall,
And hale him forth like a haltered steer, and goad and turn
him till evenfall.
To these from birth is belief forbidden; from these till
death is relief afar.
They are concerned with matters hidden - under the earthline
their altars are-
The secret fountains to follow up, waters withdrawn to
restore to the mouth,
And gather the floods as in a cup, and pour them again at a
city's drouth.
They do not preach that their God will rouse them a little
before the nuts work loose.
They do not teach that His pity allows them to drop their
job when they damn-well choose.
As in the thronged and the lighted ways, so in the dark and
the desert they stand.
Wary and watchful all their days that their brethren's days
may be long in the land.
Raise ye the stone or cleave the wood
to make a path fair or flat-Lo,
it is black already with blood some Son of Martha
spilled for that!
Not a ladder from earth to heaven, not as witness to any
creed,
But simple service simply given to his own kind in their
common need.
And the Sons of Mary smile and are blessed - they know the
angels are on their side.
They know in them is the grace confessed, and for them are
the mercies multiplied.
They sit at the feet - they hear the word - they see how
truly the promise runs.
They have cast their burden upon the Lord,
and - the Lord he lays it on Martha's Sons!